

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 5876

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, PINT, ES
SUBJECT: DIALOGUE BETWEEN PRESIDENT ROMERO AND ARCHBISHOP
ROMERO

REF: STATE 297868, SAN SALVADOR 5809, STATE 302197

1. IN A ONE-HOUR CONVERSATION ON DECEMBER 20, I TOUCHED
UPON VARIOUS TOPICS WITH PRESIDENT ROMERO AND SPECIFICALLY
SOUGHT TO ARRANGE THE DIALOGUE SUGGESTED IN REFTELS. IN
DOING THE LATTER, I REFERRED TO THE CONVERSATIONS IN
WASHINGTON, MENTIONED THE INVOLVEMENT OF AMBASSADOR
QUINONEZ AND FATHER CARTER, AND MADE CLAR THAT I WAS
ACTING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS AND AS A FRIEND OF BOTH
PARTIES TO THE PROSPECTIVE DIALOGUE.

2. PRESIDENT ROMERO HEARD ME OUT WITHOUT COMMENT BUT
WITH EVIDENT INTEREST. WITH RESPECT TO THE FOUR
POSSIBLE INTERMEDIARIES SUGGESTED IN PARA 2 OF STATE
302197, HE SAID HE KNEW ALL OF THEM TO BE PERSONS OF
HIGH INTEGRITY. AS MONG THE FOUR,
HE EXPRESSED SOME
PREFERENCE FOR THE FIRST TWO, DR. PRUDENCIO LLACH
AND DON CARLOS CANESSA, THOUGH BY NO MEANS EXCLUDING
THE OTHERS.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAN SA 05876 211949Z

3. AS I CONCLUDED MY PRESENTATION, PRESIDENT ROMERO
SAID THAT HE HAD LONG BEEN SEEKING A DIALOGUE WITH
ARCHBISHOP ROMERO BUT THAT HE HAD MET ONLY WITH
INTRANSIGENCE AND IMPOSSIBLE PRECONDITIONS. PRIESTS
RESPONSIVE TO THE ARCHBISHOP'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY,
AND THIS HE EMPHASIZED BY NO MEANS INCLUDED ALL THE

CLERGY IN EL SALVADOR, HAD MEANWHILE TRAVELLED ABROAD AND SPREAD THE MOST SCURRILOUS AND EXAGGERATED REPORTS DETERIMENTAL TO THE GOVERNMENT. THIS, HE IMPLIED, HAD HARDLY FACILITATED THE PROSPECTS FOR DIALOGUE. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT HE HAD NONETHELESS PERSISTED IN HIS EFFORT AND HAD EXPRESSED HIS READINESS TO MEET ANYWHERE AT ANY TIME WITH THE ARCHBISHOP. WHEN IT WAS THEN SUGGESTED THAT THE MEETING TAKE PLACE IN SOME OTHER COUNTRY, HE DREW THE LINE. PRESIDENT ROMERO SAID HE CONSIDERED IT TOTALLY UNREASONABLE AND AFFORDING DISPROPORTIONATE IMPORTANCE TO THE ARCHBISHOP TO SUGGEST THAT HE, AS PRESIDENT, SHOULD HAVE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY IN ORDER TO TALK WITH HIM.

4. NOW, SAID THE PRESIDENT, ARCHBISHOP ROMERO WAS NEWLY DISPOSED TO DIALOGUE BUT FOR PURELY TACTICAL REASONS OF HIS OWN. HE EXPLAINED THAT THE ARCHBISHOP IS CAUGHT UP IN AN EMBARRASSING INCIDENT OF INTERNAL CHURCH DISSENSION AT QUETZALPEQUE AND WISHES TO USE ANY DIALOGUE TO INVOLVE THE GOVERNMENT IN AN ADVERSE WAY PRIOR TO THE ARRIVAL HERE OF THE VISITORS FROM THE INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION. PRESIDENT ROMERO SAID HE WAS UNWILLING TO BE USED IN THIS WAY FOR THE ARCHBISHOP'S PURPOSES AND WOULD THEREFORE BE TOO BUSY WITH TURN-OF-THE-YEAR ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS TO PERMIT DIALOGUE WITH THE ARCHBISHOP AT THIS TIME.
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PAGE 03 SAN SA 05876 211949Z

5. THE PRESIDENT CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT THE INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION GROUP WOULD BE IN SAN SALVADOR JANUARY 9-18. IMMEDIATELY AFTER THEIR VISIT HE WOULD BE COMPLETELY READY TO MEET WITH THE ARCHBISHOP AT ANY TIME AND AT ANY PLACE WITHIN THE NATIONAL TERRITORY.

6. OTHER ASPECTS OF THE CONVERSATION ARE REPORTED IN SEPTELS.

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